

**Testimony before the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement**  
**H.B. 6403 AN ACT REQUIRING LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL FOR THE MERGER OR CLOSING OF**  
**INSTITUTIONS WITHIN THE CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.**

**Submitted by Ron Picard, Professor of English and Faculty Senate President**  
**Naugatuck Valley Community College**

March 9<sup>th</sup> 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of H.B. 6403 AN ACT REQUIRING LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL FOR THE MERGER OR CLOSING OF INSTITUTIONS WITHIN THE CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES. I request the committee approve this bill with the recommended substitute language included in my written testimony.

I have spent almost 17 years of my professional life at Naugatuck Valley Community College serving as Professor of English, Department Chair, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Institutional Effectiveness, Assessment Coordinator, Representative to the BOR Faculty Advisory Committee, and for the last 2 years Faculty Senate President. I have also served as the statewide chair of the Academic Assessment Council and spent two years serving on the system office's General Education Consolidation Committee, and the Academic and Student Affairs Students First Consolidation Committee. My purpose in serving on these consolidation committees was to mitigate as much as possible the disaster that I saw unfolding through this plan. However, in January of 2020, I resigned from this work in frustration, alongside most of the other faculty throughout the system, as I saw curriculum being rushed through a process to meet artificial deadlines without respect to quality and faculty expertise.

I should not have been surprised as one model for this merger that Mr. Ojakian and his academic leaders like to promote was Indiana's IVY Tech system. I earned my PhD. at Purdue University and had an opportunity to work in this community college system. I was hired to teach a summer course in basic writing and never met a full time faculty member. Instead, on my first day, I was handed a one page syllabus as well as a handful of one page assignments and told to go teach. The part time faculty member who handed me the materials added that I might want to join the other English faculty who were applying to do Technical Writing at Eli Lilly in addition to teaching because the pay at Lilly was much better. The syllabus and assignments at this institution were not worthy of the students who populated my class. I quickly decided that they deserved the same kind of education I delivered at Purdue, and I replaced the materials I had been given with the curriculum I taught at the university, a curriculum based on best practices in teaching writing, critical thinking, and research.

Leaving the Midwest for Naugatuck Valley was an opportunity to return to my home to continue to develop students who could become future entrepreneurs and leaders for the state of CT. I had good reason to hope in NVCC for it had been a major part of my life since I was 10 years old. I grew up in Waterbury, and my father attended Waterbury State Tech, an institution that with Mattatuck Community College formed NVCC. My father began taking classes at Waterbury State after he was laid off from his job as a draftsman for Pratt and Whitney. He graduated with a degree in Engineering the same year I graduated from high school. He then earned a bachelor degree in Business Administration

and started a business in Torrington that today is the largest airline cushion manufacturer in the world. So, I have seen what good, local community college education can do.

Three out of my four children attended the child development center at NVCC where they benefited from helping our college students working toward degrees in Early Childhood Education. The center was run by a woman from the street in Waterbury where I grew up. We had grown up together and knew each other's families well.

I have dozens of friends, family, and neighbors who began their careers with degrees from either Waterbury State Tech, Mattatuck, or Naugatuck Valley. Many used this small community college as a launching pad for the graduate degrees they now possess. My nephew graduates this spring with an NVCC degree and just passed his EMT exam after completing the NVCC EMT coursework.

The merger plan being sold to you today will put an end to this kind of local, deeply personal educational experience for current and future students. It is this highly personal, neighborhood-like approach that allows our students to feel confident and supported enough to succeed. An impersonal, monolithic corporate institution that would be one of the largest in the US in one of the smallest states does not serve anyone's interests, and so far it has cost NVCC a president who was a transformative figure not just in education and not just in Waterbury, but in every community in our region between Waterbury and Danbury. We have lost her advocacy and with her we have lost donors and industry leaders who understand the value of local control over the engine that provides them with their workforce. To replace President DeFillipis and a handful of other great, presidential leaders, the system is hiring 12 CEOs, has hired three regional president, multiple vice presidents, a Consolidated College President, a Consolidated College Provost, a system provost, and a system president. This bureaucracy is not cheaper. It's also not more efficient, and it will do nothing to foster the kind of community the students and citizens of our cities and towns deserve from their community colleges.

#### HB 6403 Recommended Substitute Language

The proposed bill states that if the legislature does not act within one year, a proposed merger or closure be deemed approved. This language allows for passive acceptance of the current demolition of our community college system. Therefore, I recommend changing the language to read that legislative inaction preclude mergers, consolidations, and closures. Changes of this magnitude require active legislative oversight. Further, I recommend adding the clause, "that the BOR shall not seek regional accreditation for a merger that has not been approved by the general assembly."